C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LUANDA 000166

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STATE FOR AF FRONT OFFICE AND AF/S

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM AO
SUBJECT: CAROL THOMPSON DISCUSSES ELECTIONS WITH THE
ANGOLAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION, OPPOSITION AND NGOS

REF: LUANDA 163

Classified By: Ambassador Cynthia Efird for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. During AF/DAS Carol Thompson,s visit to
Angola, the Chairman of the National Election Commission was
bullish on the success of the voter registration process
while opposition leaders had reservations about elections in
general. Opposition leaders thanked us for our support for
party strengthening and civic education and requested
additional USG and international assistance in these areas
and in securing additional ways to get their message out to
the population. The opposition leaders are, as in the past,
looking for the international community to help them fight
their battles, but appear to have a more well thought out and
cohesive stance. NGO representatives relayed concerns from
the populations outside provincial capitals where voter
registration hasn,t yet arrived and no schedule has been
announced as to when these communities will be registered.
End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On February 1, 2007, DAS Carol Thompson discussed
Angola,s voter registration process and future elections
with Angolan opposition leaders, National Election Commission
(CNE) Chairman Caetano de Sousa, and with US-funded
international NGOs. Thompson, DCM and poloff also visited
the CNE headquarters. Opposition leaders Isaias Samakuva
(UNITA), Eduardo Kuangana (PRS), Ngola Kabango (FNLA), Analia
Vitoria Perreira (PLD), Luis Nascimento (FPD), Luis dos
Passos (PRD), and Sediangani Mbindi (PDP-ANA) participated in
a roundtable at the US Embassy, and USG-funded NGOs HALO
Trust, Mine Action Group (MAG), Norwegian People,s Aid
(NPA), National Democratic Institute (NDI), International
Republican Institute (IRI)and IOM attended an informal dinner
with DAS Thompson.

CNE: Decidedly Upbeat on the Elections

¶3. (SBU) CNE Chairman Caetano de Sousa was upbeat on the
voter registration process, noting that registration
processing efficiency had improved and that he recently saw
ten people complete registration in just six minutes in one
station. De Sousa stressed the importance of getting an
accurate count of eligible voters and their geographical
distribution for the CNE to design the plan for the election.
 He predicted that the CNE would register between seven and
eight million people this year. DAS Thompson,s visit is
featured on the CNE website at www.cne.gv.ao.

¶4. (SBU) De Sousa explained the electoral process: the CNE
will recommend a date for elections once registration is
completed, but the Council of Ministers will set the actual
date. For logistical reasons, De Sousa believes a month in
the dry season, e.g., September, would be the most practical.
 He assured Thompson that the Commission would allow time for
political campaigning, as well. With a view to elections in

2008, everyone who will turn 18 by the end of 2007 is being registered, but once a date has been set, the CNE will open a special registration period for young voters to capture anyone who will turn 18 before election day.

¶5. (SBU) De Sousa also expressed a hope that by election day, all polling stations in the country will be linked together in a communications network, permitting individual stations to relay their votes to the provincial and then the national commissions for an immediate tally.

Opposition: Painting a Much Grittier Picture

¶6. (SBU) At an Embassy round table discussion, major opposition party leaders took turns voicing their concerns about the registration and electoral process to DAS Thompson. PLD President Analia Pereira opened the meeting, noting that the elections were important to Angolans as well as to the international community in Angola, which wants a certain security for their investments. She said that there remains still some fear of violence with elections and that the opposition has asked President dos Santos for guarantees that the Angolan army has clear rules about how it should and should not act during an election. She acknowledged the opposition,s weaker position and noted some of the advantages held by the MPLA (better funding, organization, government support), characterizing the election as the championship game between the first and third division teams. PRD,s Luis dos Passos noted that this is a country highly influenced by paternalism and the population identifies itself with the government which is now seen to be taking better care of them.

¶7. (SBU) FNLA representative Ngola Kambango attacked the

government for not setting and announcing an election date. He had little faith that the Council of the Republic could influence the government to name and stick to an election date. Sediangani (PDP-ANA) seconded Kambanga,s comments, underscoring the council,s real lack of power, by quoting an Angolan joke, &The group goes into the meeting as counselors and comes out having been counseled by the President.8 Luis Nascimento (FPD) cast his doubts that elections would occur in 2008, noting, &Since 2003 we regularly discuss elections, and the announcements are always for elections next year.8 He sadly noted that regular elections should not just be a privilege of the west and asked the USG to use its influence to press the government for elections as soon as possible. UNITA,s Samakuva also expressed doubts that elections would occur in 2008, characterizing the President,s announcement as just a way to get rid of international pressure.

¶8. (SBU) The PRS,s Eduardo Kuangana discussed the voter registration process, noting the challenges to the computerized system presented by typical Angolan elements of rain, lack of electricity and newness of computers to the majority of the population. He expressed real concern that all eligible voters would be successfully registered in the six months allotted to the process, noting that in the first month not even a million were registered. (Note: During the first month 945,000 were registered; total number to be registered is estimated at over seven million.) Kuangano and Sediangani led off a heated discussion of the government payment of USD 200,000 to each party to help defray costs of the parties, registration monitors, noting that it only covers half the party,s costs and presented DAS Thompson with spreadsheets and calculations to substantiate their arguments (See reftel A).

Need International Support for Democracy

¶9. (SBU) The parties universally acknowledged the need for &serious investment8 in democracy in Angola. Noting the lack of access to the press, Luis dos Passos asked for the international community to underwrite an &institute for

democracy,8 i.e., a center where the opposition could have access to internet connections, computers and printers for desktop publishing etc. A number of the party leaders stressed the need for continued and increased support for the NDI and IRI programs in Angola and also requested our help in encouraging the international companies to support democratic process.

¶10. (SBU) DAS Thompson thanked the opposition leaders for their frank views, acknowledging the challenges they face. She reassured them that a fair, free, democratic electoral process is a priority for the USG, acknowledging that we are also concerned that the calendar has slipped several times. DAS Thompson stressed that the USG can and will continue to pressure the GRA to set a public timetable. She said she strongly heard their requests for additional training with NDI and IRI and understood they believed this would help them perform better in the election.

¶11. (SBU) Using the US experience, DAS Thompson said that having a political record can also be exploited as a detriment, noting that the alternate party can express a new point of view; how it can improve the situation. She encouraged the opposition to work together to insure that basic milestones are put into place such as increased press access, an election timetable and greater decentralization.

NGOs: Reality Checks from the Provinces

¶12. (SBU) The NGO reps, who operate extensively in the provinces, provided DAS Thompson with overviews of their respective programs and relayed concerns they hear in Angola,s hinterlands. Regarding elections, the main concern was the lack of a schedule for when brigades would arrive in each municipality and information on the deployment of mobile brigades. NDI noted the difficulties presented to the NGO groups in planning their voter registration education programs and ability to sponsor accredited observers without a schedule of brigade movements. The HALO Trust representative noted that in many of the remote municipalities she hears doubts as to whether voter registration will reach the villages, particularly in those provinces considered traditional UNITA strongholds.

¶13. (C) Comment: As evidenced by the wide range of viewpoints, there is no easy sound-bite on the Angolan voter registration and election process. CNE President Caetano de Sousa is justly proud of CNE accomplishments; the opposition is realistic in assessing its disadvantage against the MPLA and government power and questioning when elections will

LUANDA 00000166 003 OF 003

really take place. Now that registration is underway, there has been a noticeable shift in the position of the opposition parties. Rather than simply complaining about the excessive power of the ruling MPLA, the main subject at previous opposition roundtables, they are now taking stock of themselves and their electoral prospects. They continue to request international and USG assistance and appear to think that they cannot win against the MPLA machine without such help but appear to be taking greater responsibility for trying to boost their own party images. End Comment.

¶14. (U) DAS Thompson has cleared this cable.
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